

8 JAN 1975

P-MORRIS, Donald

CIA 3.01.3

170027-6 1 TIME

CIA 4 CHINA

P-ANDERSON, Jack

CIA 7.02 STATE DEPT. - BIOGRA

Donald Morris / an analysis

Host governments know identities of CIA officials

Officially "classified" information is fair game for the media these days, and the problem is compounded by the fact that the media rarely know the "why" of classification.

Take the subject of "cover." The public is convinced that intelligence officials posted overseas live under a "cover" — which they equate with a false identity. They also believe that if their cover is "blown" — exposed — their utility at once ceases. A heavy sprinkling of media representatives will publish at once the identity of any intelligence official they stumble across, apparently under the impression that they are somehow contributing to a more open society.

This is arrant nonsense. CIA officials posted abroad, for example, almost invariably go under their true identities, and their CIA status is known to the host government. Almost invariably — especially if they have served overseas before — it is also known to the KGB. There are only two reasons

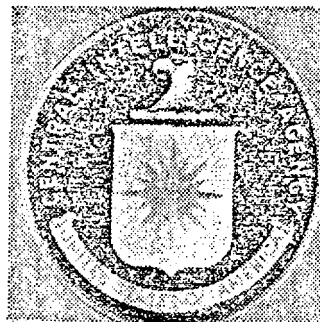
why such officials do not put a brass plaque reading "CIA" on their office doors, and neither has a direct bearing on their operational utility:

First, the official admission that they were present in the country would be politically embarrassing to the host government, no matter how friendly it was to the United States.

Second, the disclosure would inevitably subject the official and his family to harassment, in many areas of the world extending to kidnaping and assassination.

The official consequently goes under a "cover for status" — State, military or some such — which allows him to conceal his sponsorship in his ordinary comings and goings. (He may use a false identity, lightly backstopped, in actually dealing with agents, but he will not live under this "cover for action.")

On rare occasions the official may live overseas as the employee of a civil firm, concealing not only his intelligence sponsorship but also any connection with the



U.S. government, but in such cases the management of the firm always — but always — knows who he is.

The exceptions to this are behind the Curtain, or in other "denied areas," even though the host government almost undoubtedly knows whom he is working for anyway. The Soviets, for example, subject all Americans in our embassy to massive surveillance. They may know perfectly well that Aloysius Q McGillicuddy is a CIA officer, but if he is publicly labeled as such they can hardly assent to his posting.

Donald Morris served with the CIA 17 years. He has been a columnist for The Houston Post since his retirement from government service in 1972.

Identification is no real problem — a glance at the official Biographic Register will pick most of the ringers. Legitimate diplomats are "FSOs," while the "integrated" agency hands are Foreign Service Reserve — "FSRs." The State Department adamantly refuses to let the agency use the FSO label — at a dinner party, Dean Acheson once pointed this out to Allen Dulles and asked him why he didn't change it; Dulles's reply, alas, has been lost to history.

The media regard such "spook-hunting" as sport. Jack Anderson's column, for example, recently and quite gratuitously published the identity of the man slated for CIA station chief in Peking. It was unquestionably known to the Chinese already, but the posting was thus endangered.

Time magazine considered (and finally killed) a list of station chiefs in various countries. Although known to the host governments in all cases, publication of those in the Mideast and much of Latin America would have forced their recall for their own safety and that of their families.

Such puerile needling serves no practical purpose; it is sheer irresponsible journalism. There has always been a need for informed debate on the role of intelligence operations in our foreign affairs, but it will never come until there is some understanding of what the equities are — what is significant and what is irrelevant.

For all the coverage we get these days, there are few signs that such understanding is growing.

REGIST